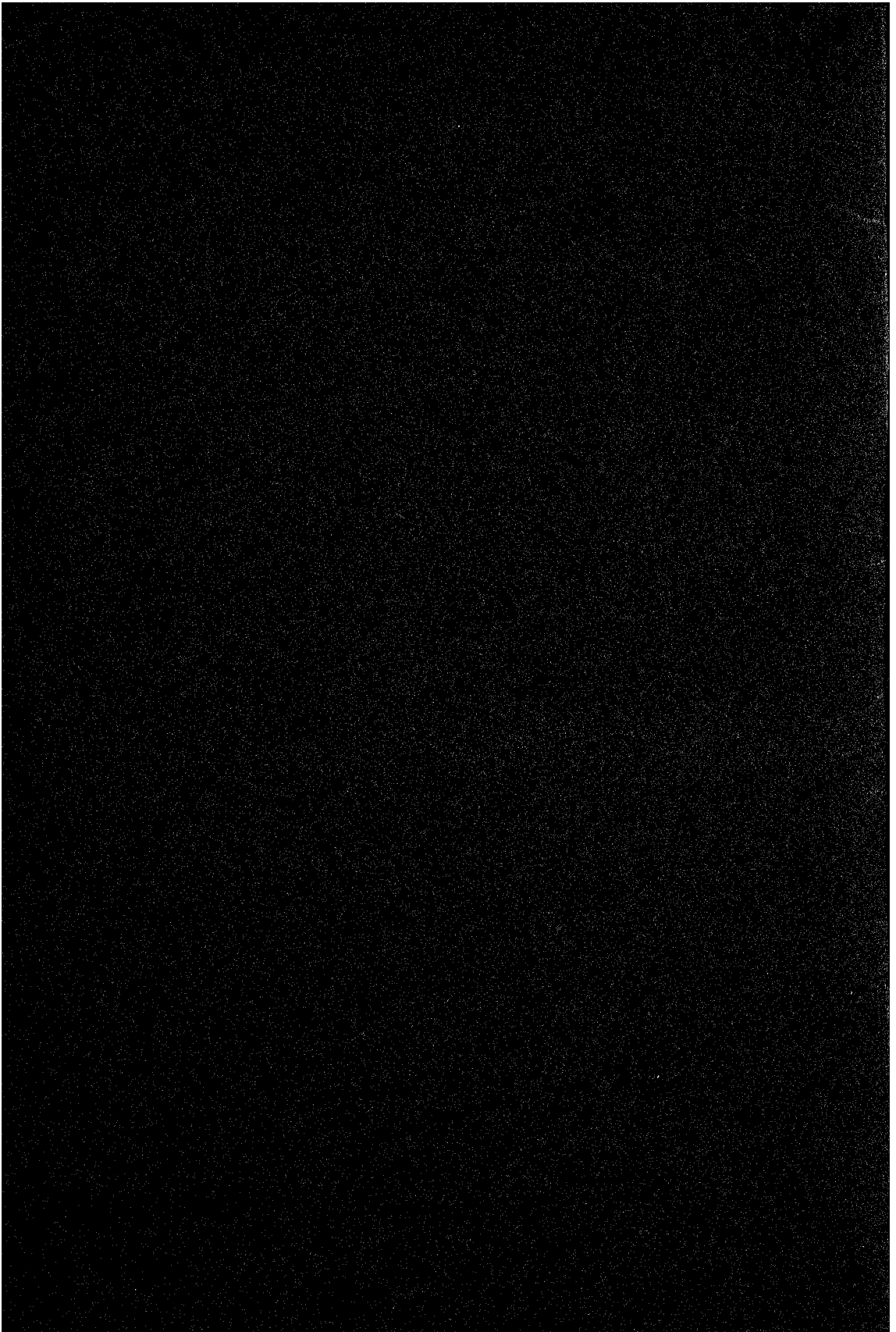


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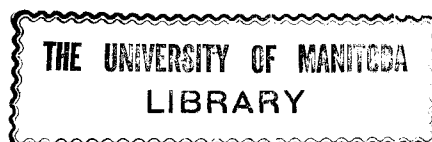
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# AIRMEN'S CLUB

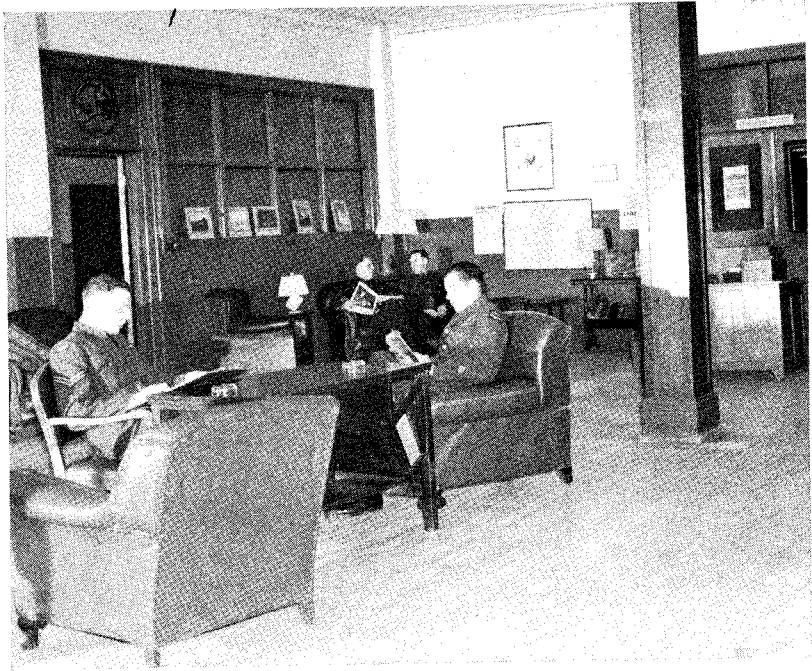
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WITH THE OPENING of the Empire Air Training Stations in the vicinity of Winnipeg, and the arrival of so many young Airmen from Overseas it was soon obvious that some place should be available for these boys to meet and make friends with us. And so, the Airmen's Club opened January 18th, 1941.

THE OBJECT OF THE CLUB was not only to have a meeting place and a small Snack Bar, but more important to place these boys in private homes for their "Leave". In this way they would become acquainted with Canadian Life, and at the same time have pleasant homey surroundings for their furlough. The response to our appeal for people who would like to entertain these young men in their homes was overwhelming. The boys were from all over the world, of many races and creeds, and, without exception, they were all entertained in private homes. In the past four years 39,732 have been placed.

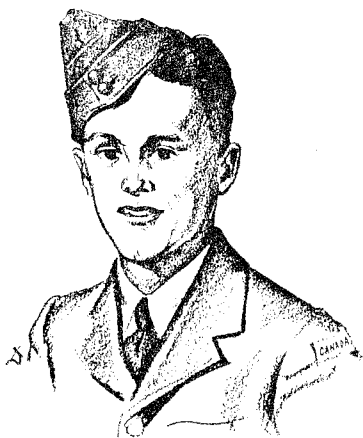
All work in connection with the Club was voluntary, members of the Winnipeg Women's Air Force Auxiliary comprised our personnel



LOUNGE



CANTEEN



CANADA

Shortly after we opened, the U.T. (under training) Pilots, for the first Royal Air Force Station to open in this Command, viz., Carberry, arrived. The Ground Crew for this station having arrived in early December, 1940. Who will ever forget that morning, forty below zero! But the boys said the warmth of our welcome soon made them forget the cold weather. Many of us had the pleasure of entertaining these boys in our homes for Christmas and New Year's leave and, although the Club was not open we had already started what was later to be called the "Placement Desk."



GREAT BRITAIN

The first Australians and New Zealanders arrived in February, 1941. They were met at the Railway Station by the Auxiliary's Station Reception Committee, and brought by bus to the Club, where they were served light refreshments before they proceeded to their Station. We will always remember these boys, and the Maoris who came with the New Zealanders.

Boys still kept arriving from Overseas but in the early spring came many from the United States. At one time we thought of the United States as

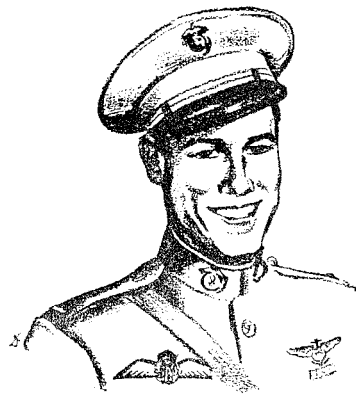
"Texas" as so many American boys seemed to come from there. However, by early summer, boys from every State in the Union were arriving to enlist in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and some 700 registered at the Club.

Those boys from Texas—who will ever forget them? "Tex" from Odessa, "E.L." from Houston, Johnny who hitch-hiked 1,500 miles from Childress, and others too numerous to mention. We placed many of these boys in private homes, until they were taken into the Air Force and were posted. We have many letters from these boys, who, shortly after Pearl Harbour transferred to the United States Air Corps. It was these delightful Texans who suggested that the Snack Bar should provide something a little more substantial than sandwiches. And the fact that we were having more boys every day, led to us enlarging the Club. Three more rooms were added, including a much needed Canteen.

About this time, we began to notice the names of different countries on the shoulder badges worn. Young men from all over the world—France, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Holland and Denmark, many of these boys having escaped from occupied territory. We tried to place them with people from their homeland, and in some small measure bring comfort to these boys, who in many instances did not know



AUSTRALIA



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



ARGENTINE

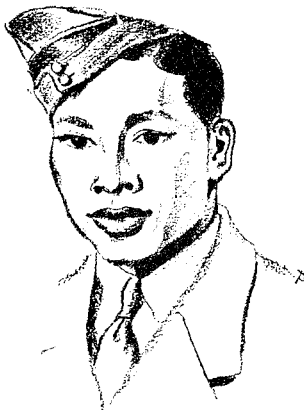
what had happened to their dear ones.

Boys from British Honduras, British Guiana, Trinidad, Barbadoes, Jamaica and the Bahamas, also arrived about this time, as well as several South Africans.

The insignia B.L.A.V. on shoulder badges puzzled us for a time, but on inquiry we found these boys came from South America. It meant "British Latin America Volunteer" and was worn by those from the Argentine, Brazil, Bolivia, Columbia Paraguay. Some of the boys were native to those countries, but the majority were British.

Our Club had indeed become cosmopolitan, Canadians rubbing shoulders with boys from all over the world.

We had thirteen boys who came direct to Canada from Singapore, among them was a Chinese boy named Tan Kai Hai. According to the "London Times" he was the first Chinese Pilot in the Royal Air Force, of the others nine were Englishmen, two Danes, and Tullah, a native of Johore.



CHINA  
"Tan Kai Hai"

Our boys from India: The first one we had was David who was with the R.A.F. but later there were the boys of the Royal India Air Force. Our most picturesque guest from



India, with his airforce blue puggree or turban, his short black beard, and about six feet tall, was nineteen-year-old Sandhu of Pakho Pur. Sandhu was a Sikh.

The darling of our hearts was Gopi from Tranvencour, southern India, who was with us so long at *Deer Lodge Hospital*, having had a very bad crash which necessitated many operations. Gopi received his wings a short time ago, and once again our prayers were answered.

Among the Maoris was "Snow" whose real name was Kereama, of Marton, New Zealand. Many of these Maoris had beautiful voices, and we volunteers will never forget the *evening we listened to Maori songs*, sung in the Canteen by three of these boys.

There are many stories to be told, some full of humour and others full of pathos. The very young boys homesick, and finding everything strange in our Country. What did we do for them? Found homes with kind people. Soon their *longing for home faded away* only to return when they were on their way home. Many boys who failed as Pilots, had to be comforted. We sewed stripes and wings on by the hundreds, darned sox, mended uniforms.



INDIA



NEW ZEALAND  
"Snow"



FRANCE



NEW ZEALAND

Listened to their love stories, looked at hundreds of photographs of their wives, babies and sweethearts, and we loved it all. Many times our laughter was very close to tears. We were like a big family, our own Canadian boys and others from all over the world.

How did we entertain our big family? Always they were *encouraged to accept the hospitality of private homes*. Concerts and dances were given at the Club, where the Junior Hostesses from the Auxiliary helped to entertain. Parties were given for newly arrived trainees, who were to be stationed in and around Winnipeg, for boys who were passing through and would be here only a few hours, and there was the night we entertained 289 Sergeant Pilots, of the Royal Australian Air Force, and Gracie Fields sang to them after her concert at the Auditorium, coming from there with His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. McWilliams. That was a gala night for all of us. We volunteers enjoyed the parties as much as the guests.

Our first Christmas party in the big lounge is a happy memory. Christmas dinner was served to over 200 boys from all over the world, meetings of

old school friends and friends, they had left behind in England. The boys were all very interested in our guests from Singapore, especially the Australians and New Zealanders, as many had hopes of being sent to the far East, and especially to Singapore, where countless numbers of their countrymen were stationed during 1941.

The busiest place in the Club was the Canteen. We had seating capacity for twenty-four. Breakfast, dinner and supper were served. During the week we averaged around 200 meals a day but on week-ends, which began on Friday, when trainees as well as Station Staff arrived on Leave, we served anywhere from twelve to fifteen hundred. Bacon and eggs were in great demand and thirty to forty dozen eggs cooked in an evening soon became routine. How the volunteers in the Canteen did this, no one will ever know, but it was done, and on a four ring gas stove with oven. Finally, the Winnipeg Electric Company took pity on us, and built us a six ring stove. And a kind friend gave us a steam table. Then we went to town! No request of the boys, were they Canadian, American or from across the Sea, was too much trouble for



CZECHOSLOVAKIA



JAMAICA

the volunteers who cooked for them. 596,879 boys were served in the Canteen during the last four years.

We were the first Airmen's Club in Canada. All work was done voluntarily and we all had the same idea in our minds, to make this a home from home, and not just a Canteen. The boys watched us do the cooking as they had watched their Mothers in their own homes. They helped us wash dishes, peel potatoes, and in fact did everything but the cooking. Indeed many the bowl and spoon were licked after the cake was iced.

The expenses of the Club were not carried by the Canteen. When, by any chance we were on the right side of the ledger, we had chicken or turkey for Sunday dinner. Never do we hear the song "A Wing and a Prayer" without thinking of our Club. We had many interested friends, and they always seemed to be on our doorstep when anything was needed. Our donations every year exceeded our losses.

Not many people know that the Airmen's Club of Winnipeg is called by the boys far and wide as the "World's Most Famous Club." And perhaps with good reason, for our boys are all over the world. Letters and messages come from Canadians, who have never been in the Club (but who come from in and around Winnipeg) and they tell of meeting Indian boys in India who speak to them of the Airmen's Club, Australians and New Zealanders who meet our boys in Italy and the middle East who speak of us. It would not surprise us at all to learn someday, that we were known by the underground of all occupied countries in Europe.

Our volunteers, be it Placement, Canteen or Housework, gave many hours of untiring service. Many of the Canteen shifts are still working together in 1945. We do not need thanks. The hundreds of letters from our boys are enough. One, received from David Kumar (Vijendra Kumar) our first Indian Airman expresses the finest thanks which could be given:

"Believe me, a club like yours does more to bring International Friendship together than all the Leagues of Nations in the world."

This outline of the activities of the Airmen's  
Club is prepared as a souvenir for all those,  
whose work made the Club possible.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "L. A. Smith", written in dark ink.

Chairman.

Winnipeg, Manitoba,  
April 30th, 1945.

